

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

The Rewards and Challenges

Increasingly, when parents are unable to care for their children, grandparents step in.

Raising a grandchild brings challenges and rewards. While you may have less energy, you have more wisdom to make a difference in your grandchild's life.

Here are some tips to deal with the added stress of parenting a second generation:

Protect your health to raise healthy grandchildren.

Your schedule includes juggling new demands, but avoid the temptation to postpone your own medical appointments or refill prescriptions. Don't ignore your own needs. Make it a priority to keep up with regular physicals, get plenty of sleep and do activities you enjoy. Set aside daily "me" time.

Be realistic about your grandchild's feelings and your own emotions. The new living arrangement may stir up unexpected feelings. Your grandchild may express negative or mixed emotions instead of appreciation for the sacrifices you've made. This may in turn make you feel resentful, guilty or angry. It may take time to adjust and heal.

Talk often. Open and honest communication is key when dealing with a life-altering event. Your grandchild needs to know he or she can talk to you. Be available. Also consider talking to a professional if your grandchild has serious behavior issues.

Enforce routines to help your grandchild better adjust. Set a schedule for eating, homework and bedtimes. Assign age-appropriate chores. Explain house rules and enforce them consistently.

Talk to an attorney about your legal status.

You may want to establish some kind of legal relationship. Without one, you may not be able to make medical decisions or access school records for your grandchild. Formal legal relationships include custody, guardianship and adoption.

Join a support group. Meeting other grandparent-headed families can provide a network to learn about respite services, financial help, legal advice and counseling. For a database of Virginia support groups and services go to www.grandfactsheets.org. Don't be embarrassed to ask for help.

By serving as a caregiver, you keep your family intact. However, when you meet your own needs, you are in a stronger position to meet the needs of your grandchildren.



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1-800-552-7096 Virginia Child Abuse Hotline (language line available)

800-Children (800-244-5373) Parent Helpline